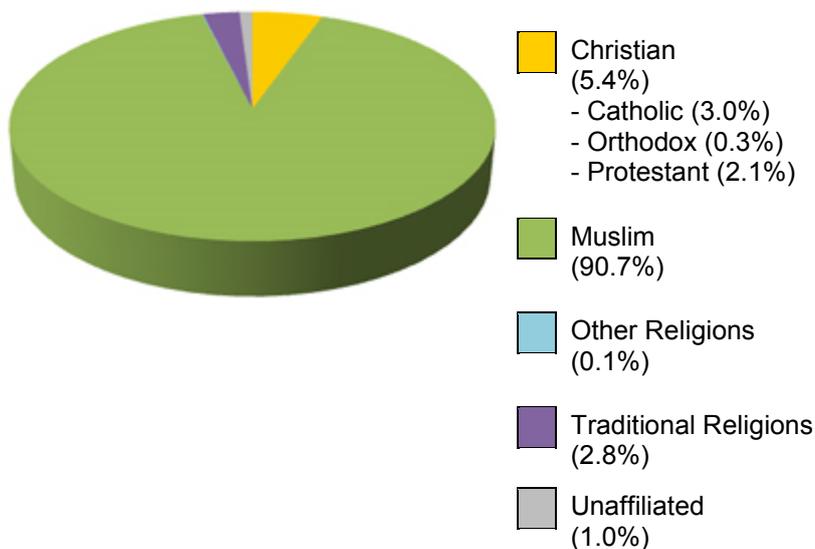


# SUDAN



Population:	Area:	Refugees (internal)*:	Refugees (external)**:	Internally displaced:
37,200,000	1,886,000 km <sup>2</sup>	155,910	632,014	1,873,300
		* Foreign refugees living in this country.		** Citizens of this country, now living abroad.

Although Sudan's Interim National Constitution defends religious freedom and recognises the country's cultural and religious diversity,<sup>1</sup> it enshrines *Shari'a* as the source of legislation.<sup>2</sup> The Constitution was adopted in 2005, the year of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Khartoum government and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), an accord which brought to an end more than 20 years of civil war. The wording of the Constitution reflects the open spirit of that time and a readiness to include minorities and accept diversity. However, this all changed when the south seceded from the rest of Sudan and became a separate country in July 2011 following a referendum. Since then, the policies of Sudan's ruling National Congress Party (NCP) have rejected the spirit of pluralism and religious tolerance.<sup>3</sup> The government is a staunch supporter of political Islam. Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, who heads the NCP, is pledging a return to Islam and to various political positions taken up by the government during the civil war. The government has publicly announced plans for a new national Constitution which is '100 percent Islamic'.<sup>4</sup> The government seems set to return to more repressive and intolerant attitudes against groups seen as anti-Islamic or pro-Western. Popular protests opposing these policies have met with uncompromising government resistance.

Discrimination against non-Muslims and policies opposing religious pluralism have continued and in a number of cases have intensified. There is a clear hostility against people of South Sudanese ethnic origin still living in Sudan, who are immediately regarded as Christians. Moreover, the Church is considered to have been one of the promoters of the secession of South Sudan and is consequently regarded as a negative influence within the country. In addition, the decrease in the number of Christians is now used by the government to force through a reduction in clergy and

<sup>1</sup>Constitution Chapter 1, Articles 1, 6 and 38

<sup>2</sup>Article 5 (1) Nationally enacted legislation having effect only in respect of the Northern states of the Sudan shall have as its sources of legislation Islamic Shari'a and the consensus of the people.

<sup>3</sup>The Sudanese government constantly plays a double-game of diplomatic charm in front of international observers and organisations and extremely limited exercise of liberties on the ground. For instance, in these declarations the Minister for Guidance and Religious Endowments stresses the necessity of building churches in front of the WCC representative, but the reality is completely different. Cf. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/sudanese-churches-an-important-voice-in-rebuilding-nation> See also point 5 on church construction.

<sup>4</sup>"We want to present a constitution that serves as a template to those around us. And our template is clear, a 100 percent Islamic constitution, without communism or secularism or Western [influences]," said Al Bashir. More on <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/sudan/al-bashir-sudan-statute-to-be-100-islamic-1.1046029>

other official personnel. The government has taken steps to 'retake' Church buildings and land that 'are no longer used'.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the government has clearly stated that no licences will be given for new churches. Activities of Christian Churches therefore remain highly compromised; they are constantly monitored and targeted by security agencies, which eventually take action to disrupt evangelisation and educational activities.<sup>6</sup>

This oppression of Christians, which also includes the destruction of places of worship, religious materials and the harassment of individuals, is causing great fear and a sense of vulnerability and anxiety among the small Christian minority still present in the country.<sup>7</sup> Prominent representatives of the most radical wings of Islam are publicly asking the government to 'do more' to decrease the presence of Christians and expose converts or others involved in missionary work.<sup>8</sup> One of the demographic issues that has been present in the country since the secession of the south in 2011 has been the large number of Southern Sudanese (mostly Christians) who, being unable to get means of transport back to their ancestral lands, have become stranded in different parts of the north and have suddenly become refugees.<sup>9</sup>

The Sudanese regime is threatened by internal division and political dissension. Not everybody agrees with its intolerant policies and the lack of true civil freedoms. The security apparatus carefully monitors religious movements of any kind that might harbour, promote or spread criticism against the government. Also, mosques and meeting places of Sufi religious brotherhoods are regularly monitored by security personnel. Among the Muslims in Sudan, there is an old tradition of Sunni 'brotherhoods' or Sufi orders. They are sometimes regarded by 'official' Islam as heterodox since they have not supported the intransigent political Islam promoted by President Bashir and the National Islamic Front.

Conversions from Islam to Christianity, especially among those of Arab origin, are highly controversial and can have serious consequences for the people involved. These include being forcibly cut off from family and friends, parents losing custody of their children, arrest as well as physical and psychological violence. A very vague 'Apostasy Law' protects the rights of Muslim believers and leaves the door open for punishment of converts, including nullification of marriage where a convert or a Christian marries a Muslim woman. A number of converts have fled the country.<sup>10</sup>

Regulations concerning dress and morals (especially Article 152 of the Sudanese Public Order Code) have been enforced with renewed vigour.<sup>11</sup> This has prompted increasing resistance from opposition groups including on social networks.

There are areas of particular concern such as the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile region.<sup>12</sup> In these areas where there is a situation of grave humanitarian need, the Khartoum regime is carrying out a low intensity war against the local populations (who are accused of

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<sup>5</sup>It has been observed that a number of corrupt members of the government are taking advantage of certain situations to make gains in real estate activities with shameless impunity.

<sup>6</sup>An extensive description of the present situation of Christians is given at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/02/27/us-sudan-christians-idNBRE91Q0QQ20130227>

<sup>7</sup>Cf. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/27/us-sudan-christians-idUSBRE91Q0QQ20130227> The US Secretary of State has highlighted Sudan as a 'Country of Particular Concern' since August 2011 under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article46577>; <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/18571>

<sup>9</sup>A number of initiatives have taken place to make the public aware of their situation and eventually to raise funds for their transport to the south, see <http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/51409>.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. a case of loss of custody <http://www.persecution.org/2013/02/27/christian-convert-in-sudan-loses-right-to-see-children/> and another one of forced exile <http://www.persecution.org/2013/07/15/christian-convert-in-sudan-flees-country-because-of-persecution/> Another case of violence against converts at <http://morningstarnews.org/2013/09/sudanese-woman-faces-ordeal-as-convert-from-islam/> There is also the issue of Islamic clergy asking for a 'final solution' to Christianisation efforts in the country due to the many apostasies recorded by the Islamic Centre for Preaching and Comparative Studies. <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article46577>

<sup>11</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/10/woman-sudan-hijab-flogging\\_n\\_3894950.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/10/woman-sudan-hijab-flogging_n_3894950.html)

<sup>12</sup>According to UN figures, 450,000 people have been affected by the conflict in Southern Blue Nile and one million people in Southern Kordofan (Nuba Mountains). News of bombings, especially in the Nuba Mountains, has been recurrent in this period <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/sudan-indiscriminate-bombing-exacerbates-humanitarian-crisis-southern-kordofan-2013-04-17> and these aerial attacks both within Sudan and in Southern Sudan have even been confirmed by means of satellite surveillance <http://www.satsentinel.org/> An exhaustive record of all recent bomb attacks up to September 2013 can be found in <http://www.sudanbombing.org/reports/sept-13-bombing-update.docx>

rebelling against the central government); Christians are doubly targeted, because of their ethnic origin and their non-Muslim creed.<sup>13</sup>

The Sudan Council of Churches has worked to promote ecumenism.<sup>14</sup> The fact that different churches and denominations are suffering the same plight of persecution and discrimination fosters strengthened unity and solidarity among different Christian groups.

### **Incidents of religious persecution, oppression and/or discrimination**

In December 2012, two Coptic Orthodox priests were arrested by security forces after allegedly having helped a woman (reportedly the daughter of a Salafist leader) to convert to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> One of the priests from the Nuba Mountains was psychologically abused and beaten. The other one, being of Egyptian (Arab) origin, was imprisoned.

A church belonging to the Sudan Pentecostal Church in Soba Al Aradi, a suburb of the capital Khartoum, was destroyed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2013 by representatives of the Ministry of Infrastructure who were accompanied by police. The demolition took place without prior warning. Ministry officials alleged that the site 'belongs to a church whose members are South Sudanese, but they are no longer citizens of Sudan'. The officials also destroyed the nearby home of the pastor of the Presbyterian Church. On 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January, seven other buildings in Khartoum as well as a health centre run by the Sudan Council of Churches were destroyed, again following statements that South Sudanese were no longer Sudanese citizens. The buildings belonged to the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church of Sudan, the Africa Inland Church, the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the Sudan Pentecostal Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>16</sup>

On 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013 security forces confiscated books from the Anglican Church Bookshop in Bahri (Khartoum North) and closed down the centre in Central Khartoum. They arrested Philemon Hassan, a well-known singer and composer of Christian songs, who comes from the Nuba Mountains.<sup>17</sup> A few days before, material from the Evangelical Literature Centre belonging to the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church was confiscated and a church leader was beaten for taking photos.<sup>18</sup>

According to a February 2013 report from human rights organisation Christian Solidarity Worldwide, security forces arrested 55 Christians. They were not charged but jailed for two weeks.<sup>19</sup> They were subsequently accused of receiving money from foreign countries including Israel.

In April 2013 a Catholic priest from South Sudan working at the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference was expelled from the country<sup>20</sup> as well as two De La Salle religious brothers from France and Egypt, who were given three days to leave.<sup>21</sup> The government alleged that illegal activities were taking place in the centre where they worked. The building had been used as a centre for Arabic language classes for foreign missionaries but, with no new Church personnel now

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<sup>13</sup>The Sudan Council of Churches did not hesitate to describe the ongoing military operations against civilians in Nuba Mountains as ethnic cleansing <http://catholicradionetwork.org/?q=node/9480>; <http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/51409> These accusations of ethnic cleansing have been corroborated even by other non-religious news sources <http://gulfnnews.com/news/region/sudan/ethnic-cleansing-going-on-in-south-of-sudan-1.1134347> and <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301190002.html>, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/sudan-accused-of-ethnic-cleansing-of-nuba-people-1473727.html>

<sup>14</sup>On 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013, two years after the independence of the south, two ecumenical bodies were established, the Sudan Council of Churches (for Sudan) and the South Sudan Council of Churches (for South Sudan), a decision taken after the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the SCC. Cf. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/two-ecumenical-bodies-established-for-sudan-and-south-sudan>

<sup>15</sup><http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/20/256122.html>

<sup>16</sup>Cf. <http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=7ec6d7eb2533a90581f839110&id=f53df08622&e=4dd4dd3cf1>

<sup>17</sup>Cf. <http://catholicradionetwork.org/?q=node/9463>

<sup>18</sup>Cf. <http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=7ec6d7eb2533a90581f839110&id=f53df08622&e=4dd4dd3cf1>

<sup>19</sup>Cf. <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2013/s13020113.htm>

<sup>20</sup>Priests of South Sudanese origin, even if they were born in Sudan, are not given Sudanese nationality or a stay permit, and if they leave the country, they cannot return.

<sup>21</sup>The priest was Fr. Santino Maurino, Secretary General of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference in Khartoum. Cf. <http://www.voanews.com/content/south-sudanese-priest-expelled-sudan/1642226.html>

allowed into the country, the two religious brothers were using the centre to help children to prepare for the Sudanese Certificate.

Four pastors and volunteers from the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) were arrested in Khartoum on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013.<sup>22</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2014, staff from Sudan's Criminal Investigation Bureau entered the compound of Omdurman Evangelical Church and arrested SPEC minister Rev Yahya Abdelrahim Halu as part of a government plan to take over the Church's properties.<sup>23</sup> Reports stated that the Federal Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments sought to replace the Rev Halu, the church's senior leader and moderator of the SPEC synod, with a government-appointed committee that favours turning SPEC properties over to the government. The Rev Halu was held at the Central Khartoum Police Station for two days.

Human rights organisations denounced reports that doctors in Sudan were being forced to carry out inhuman *Shari'a* based punishments on prisoners. These included cross-amputations (of the right hand and the left foot) carried out under orders from the Sudanese government.<sup>24</sup>

Officials from the government, particularly the Minister for Guidance and Religious Endowments, publicly stressed that 'no new churches are needed in Sudan', as a result of South Sudan becoming independent. He said no new licences would be granted to build churches.<sup>25</sup> In addition, confidential reports described many church or parish schools and Church-owned educational institutions in Omdurman, Khartoum Bahri and Central Khartoum being confiscated or closed by the government.<sup>26</sup>

Entry visas and work/residence permits for Church personnel (missionaries, development workers for faith-based organisations, volunteers) have become more difficult to obtain. This follows government statements that it is pointless to maintain education and pastoral work opportunities for people of South Sudanese extraction as they were leaving the country en masse. Some missionaries have reportedly been working without proper documentation. Others who have spent a number of years working in Sudan have now been prevented from returning to the country. Church personnel including bishops have been interrogated at government offices and questioned about their activities.

Reports described churches, schools and religious buildings in the Nuba Mountains being intentionally destroyed by aerial bombing on numerous occasions.<sup>27</sup>

### **Pregnant mother Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag sentenced to death for apostasy**

In Sudan, the death sentence pronounced on Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014 created a wave of international protest. She was found guilty of apostasy from Islam, a crime punishable by death under *Shari'a* law. Meriam insisted that she had always been a Christian to which the prosecution argued that as her father was a Muslim she should be classed as a follower of Islam. In her defence, Meriam stated that her father had abandoned the family when she was very young leaving her mother, an Ethiopian Orthodox, to raise Meriam on her own. She produced evidence to show she had married a Christian named Daniel Wani at St Matthew's Catholic Cathedral, Khartoum. The judge gave Meriam three days to convert to Islam but she refused saying that she

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<sup>22</sup>Report in Arabic can be found in <http://www.hurriyatsudan.com/?p=117930>

<sup>23</sup>International Christian Concern report 2014/03/02 <http://www.persecution.org/2014/03/02/pastor-in-sudan-arrested-by-government-authorities/>

<sup>24</sup>Cf. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/27/sudan-doctors-perform-amputations-courts>

<sup>25</sup>Cf. <http://www.wnd.com/2013/04/sudan-no-new-churches-necessary/> and <http://www.charismanews.com/world/39178-amid-christian-persecution-sudan-government-proclaims-religious-freedom>

<sup>26</sup>The famous 'Comboni Playground' is a large and very valuable plot in the middle of Khartoum which was closed without any written order in <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/security-close-comboni-fields-khartoum> A brief list of closed educational centres and institutions belonging to Churches (in Arabic) in <http://www.hurriyatsudan.com/?p=117930>

<sup>27</sup>Cf. <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.killed.in.sudan.bombing/31194.htm>; <http://catholicradionetwork.org/?q=node/8582>; <http://catholicradionetwork.org/?q=node/9227>; <http://www.persecution.org/2012/12/15/sudans-christians-facing-bombings-arrests-starvation/>; <http://www.combonisouthsudan.org/index.php/428-khartoum-blasts-heiban-catholic-church> and even a mosque was destroyed by Antonov bombs <http://catholicradionetwork.org/?q=node/8473>

could not in conscience abandon her faith. Sent to jail at Omdurman Federal Women's Prison, near Khartoum, with her 20-month-old son, Martin Wani, she gave birth to a baby girl on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2014. The authorities said the death sentence would not be carried out until two years had passed since the baby's birth. On 31<sup>st</sup> May, Sudanese officials initially told the BBC that she would be freed but this was subsequently denied. Her husband, Ishag, denied being told of her release.<sup>28</sup> In a letter to *The Times* of London dated 31<sup>st</sup> May 2014, Aid to the Church in Need's John Pontifex described the law courts' treatment of Meriam as 'a timely wake-up call to us in the West about the scale of human rights abuses in Sudan'. He said that 'it is almost as if [Christians and other minorities] are non-persons and have no rights at all.'<sup>29</sup>

## **Perceptions on improvement or deterioration in Religious Freedom**

The scenario concerning religious freedom in Sudan after the independence of South Sudan looks troubling. After some years of lenience (from the signature of the peace agreement in 2005 till the independence of the south in 2011), the government is reverting to policies of 'low-intensity intolerance' towards people of non-Islamic faiths. This means not taking an iron-fist or violent stand against religious minorities but slowly obstructing their activities by various administrative or coercive means.

The secession of South Sudan has sparked anti-Christian sentiment among Sudanese leaders, especially Islamist ones. As well as frequently denouncing 'infidels', they blame Christians for encouraging people to vote for South Sudan independence. This tension has led to a breakdown in civil liberties for minority groups. Widespread protests and revolts took place in September 2013 on the streets of all main cities and security agencies ruthlessly crushed them.<sup>30</sup> Accused of supporting powers in the West, religious minorities have suffered oppression both from the government and security forces. Current trends point towards increased difficulties regarding the daily life of many religious minorities; they face renewed harassment, oppression and in some cases outright persecution. Sizeable groups of Southerners awaiting repatriation to their new country have suffered dire humanitarian conditions and government indifference to their plight, though this is not entirely the product of religious hatred.

Rifts within the government of Omar al-Bashir as well as the President's indictment for war crimes by the International Criminal Court may explain the government's increased intolerance towards groups regarded as a threat to his regime. Societal abuses and religious discrimination are likely to continue or even intensify in the near future.

## **Broader factors**

Sudan is in great turmoil for economic, social and political reasons. Huge uncertainty surrounds the survival of President Omar al-Bashir and his regime, whose authority appears to rest only on security and police repression rather than any form of diverse popular support. After a comparatively brief period of greater openness to 'Southerners' – notably Christians – between 2005 and 2011, minorities are under increasing pressure now that Omar al-Bashir's government failed to win their support in his bid for a united Sudan.

Traditionally, Sudanese people were very tolerant towards religious minorities. The arrival of Omar al-Bashir's regime in 1989 marked a radical change in government attitudes. In the years that followed, torture and extra-judicial killings by security agencies took place with total impunity. The Sudan government was far more tolerant towards religious groups that were neither socially active nor possessed of a missionary zeal. The regime wanted Church groups to keep to themselves in their Church activities and, for this reason, communities such as the Orthodox and Copts were

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<sup>28</sup> BBC News, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2014.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

<sup>30</sup> ...the most compelling reports suggest a figure of almost 1,000 killed or wounded, with more than 1,000 arrested-the latter a number that continues to grow rapidly' Asharq Al-Awsat [Khartoum and London], 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013. More on <http://allafrica.com/stories/201310020436.html?viewall=1>

shown more tolerance than Catholics or Anglicans. The regime only understood religious freedom in liturgical and spiritual terms and took a hostile view of faith groups who promoted education, undertook charity work, social development and civic awareness.

In the past, the Sudan government has not hesitated to use even deadly force against its opponents. The government's decision to block foreign agencies offering emergency help to threatened regions such as South Kordofan, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile, shows how far the regime is prepared even now to make people suffer to achieve its aims. For the future, it seems the regime will not hesitate to carry out brutal repression.